



**Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission**

**2006 - 2010  
Strategic Plan**

**Presented on: September 22, 2005**

## Purpose of this Plan

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission is entering its eleventh year of promoting, supporting and mobilizing national service and volunteer activity within Nebraska. During its initial decade, the Commission has made great strides and is on the verge of moving forward into true excellence. This progress has been made in sometimes halting steps, though recent momentum had been much more rapid. All progress has occurred however in the absence of an overarching strategic plan. While the Commission has demonstrated great competence in developing plans for discreet operational functions, these have largely been done in isolation – without strategic insight.

This plan aims to review the history of the Commission, examine its mission and organizational values, outline key environmental factors, identify current strengths and limitations, and plot key goals. It is hoped that this process will increase understanding and consensus – creating a clear course of action for future developments.

## History

### Origin

In 1993, the Corporation for National and Community Service was established. The Corporation was created to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and their nation. It merged the work and staffs of two predecessor agencies, ACTION and the Commission on National and Community Service. An element of local control was part of the intent of the founding legislation, and State Commissions were soon being created across the country.

### **How AmeriCorps Programs Get Funded**

*Like all states, Nebraska receives a set amount for allocation to programs in the state, formula funding. This formula is based on population. As a less populous state, Nebraska [through the Commission] is limited in the programming it can directly fund. Another avenue for program funding is the national competitive process. Programs funded through this “stream” tend to be larger and more managerially sophisticated than the formula program. The Commission provides programmatic and financial oversight for both “formula” and “competitive” programs. A third stream is “national direct”. Large national non-profits apply for and are awarded members which they then place in local communities in 2 or more states. These programs are encouraged to have members collaborate with the Commission in the state where members are placed. In Nebraska, this collaboration has been relatively minimal.*

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission was created by Executive Order # 94-5 signed by Governor E. Benjamin Nelson on July 26, 1994.

The Nebraska Executive Order was issued in recognition of the vital importance of community service in meeting the needs of Nebraska communities; the value of united effort by a dedicated citizenry; and the strength of collective action by the diverse residents of Nebraska in making “the good life better”.

Specific responsibilities prescribed in the Executive Order are:

- the development of a comprehensive state national & community service plan;
- promotion of national & community service within Nebraska;
- coordination of community service activities and programs in Nebraska;
- identification, solicitation, review, and recommendation for funding of national service applications for funding;
- administration of AmeriCorps grants in Nebraska;
- provision of training & technical assistance to AmeriCorps programs and other community service programming; and
- provision of assistance to the Nebraska Department of Education in preparation of its AmeriCorps application.

The Executive Order also goes into some detail in outlining the composition of the Commission membership and its structure. All Commissioners are appointed by the Governor. There may not be more than 25 voting members nor 10 ex-officio non-voting members.

Despite periodic thought to codify the Commission, its existence remains exclusively dictated by this original Executive Order with no state legislative action having occurred to cement the Commission’s existence. [The full text of Executive Order 94-5 is included as ATTACHMENT A of this Strategic Plan.]

### **Early Years: Growth & Instability**

The original Commissioners were primarily leaders in volunteer management and members of a pre-existing group created to formulate ways to increase volunteer activity in Nebraska. For several years creative tension existed among and between the Commissioners and Commission staff as to the primary thrust of the Commission. Many Commissioners held to the belief that the Commission's primary responsibility lay in advancing volunteer service within the state. Staff meanwhile were largely obligated to dedicate themselves to functions related to AmeriCorps as funding – and thus their salaries – was almost exclusively provided by the national Corporation for National & Community Service for AmeriCorps-related duties. There was also significant confusion and disagreement among the commissioners themselves. The name of the Commission [incorporating the word “volunteer”] and limited – but growing – understanding of AmeriCorps by Commissioners furthered this divide. Even into 2005, the primary purpose of the Commission and its role in volunteerism in Nebraska remained a frequently asked question among Commissioners.

A key function of the Commission since its inception has been the provision of training and technical support to national service participants. This is accomplished with funds earmarked for this purpose by the Corporation for National & Community Service. Traditional training offerings have included orientations at the beginning of the program year for members and key AmeriCorps program staff, technical guidance to AmeriCorps program staff regarding reporting requirements, skill development sessions for members – particularly conflict resolution and first aid, most publicly – the annual Governor's Conference on Community Service. The Governor's Conference, which will be entering its 14<sup>th</sup> year in 2006, is the signature training event provided by the Commission. The First Lady's Awards for Outstanding Community Service, recognizing excellence in volunteer and national service in several categories, have been presented as a component of the Governor's Conference. Traditional attendees have been those affiliated with national service programs and volunteer management professionals. Modest efforts to expand the audience in recent years to those with a broader role in community service – public officials, cooperative extension officers, educational officials, and others – have met with little success. Including logical partners in training opportunities is a way to increase the reach and exposure of the Commission and may also be a revenue generating activity.

During its early years, the Commission did not generally promulgate a set of Commissioner-approved policies and procedures. Instead, procedures and policies were derived from federal guidance and put in place through ad hoc letters and direction to commissioners, staff and programs.

Staffing was also irregular, with the founding Executive Director and the original Program Officer providing some degree of continuity. Still, between May 1997 and September 2001 there were 13 different staff assistants - many of whom were temporary. Complicating Commission operations was difficulty in securing the local matching resources needed to fully access Corporation for National & Community Service funds allocated for operation of the Commission. The situation became so dire that during the 1998-1999 program year, the Commission was closed two days each week due to the inability to meet Administrative matching fund requirements.

Recognizing the need for community support and complementary revenue streams, the Commission had created the Volunteer and Community Service Foundation of Nebraska which was incorporated as an independent not-for-profit charitable Nebraska foundation on December 6, 1996. The aims of the Foundation are to:

1. financially support the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission in its mission;
2. identify, support and advance community service and volunteer efforts among Nebraskans of all ages, incomes, abilities and ethnic origins; and
3. support the objectives and programs of the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission, promoting and supporting the efforts of all Nebraskans united in strengthening their communities, state and nation through community service.

Despite these noble goals, the Foundation was almost entirely inactive in seeking or securing support. This inactivity continued into 2005, although there are signs of invigoration. In 2004, the Foundation Board reviewed its purpose and simplified it to be: support community and volunteer service in partnership with the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission. Furthermore on May 13, 2005 the Board agreed to simplify the name of the foundation to the Nebraska Volunteer Foundation – though this change has not been made through legal channels yet.

In April 2000 the founding Executive Director resigned and the staff assistant also left. For the remainder of 2000 the original Program Officer attempted to fulfill all staff responsibilities – complemented by a series of temporary assistants. Scheduled Commission meetings during this period often did not meet quorum requirements with many commissioners visibly unengaged. Further disruption was experienced during the summer of 2000 by the need for the Commission offices to temporarily relocate from the State Capitol to the Old Federal Building in downtown Lincoln due to renovations in the Capitol.

Despite the administrative challenges facing the Commission, AmeriCorps programming grew in Nebraska during this period. The number of operating programs grew from one to three [1995-1997], to seven [1997-1998], to nine [1998 – 1999], and finally to twelve [1999-2000] before stabilizing at 10 programs [both 2000-2001 and 2001-2002].

### **Revitalization**

Stabilization of the Commission began with the hiring of the current Executive Director, Debra Hartmann, in January 2001. Two months later, in March 2001, the original Program Officer resigned. By November of that year though, the office was fully staffed with permanent employees for the first time since 1997. Full staffing has remained the norm, though there has been significant turnover in the Program Officer position – which has hopefully ended with the tenure of the incumbent – Gale Jungemann-Schulz.

Along with full staffing came renewed attention to establishing and implementing policies & procedures and comprehensive programmatic monitoring. Throughout 2001-2002, the Commission codified policies and procedures and initiated risk-based monitoring strategies. Adopted policies and procedures were implemented immediately. Comprehensive monitoring began in earnest during the 2002-2003 grant year.

The Commission was also active in capitalizing on the benefits afforded by its “host” state agency, the Nebraska Health & Human Services System. Benefits previously not accessed include tapping into the Local Area Network (LAN) and the wealth of professional development trainings.

With this burst of energy, the Commission prepared for and completed its Corporation Administrative Standards Audit in September 2002 with all action items resolved by spring 2003. Unfortunately during 2002-2003 there was significant concern with the Corporation for National & Community Service and its budgetary practices. As a result Nebraska AmeriCorps programming was effected by a national hiring freeze for 2002-2003 and diminished competitive grant awards for 2003-2004.

Like all state commissions, the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission is subject to an Inspector General Audit to ensure sufficient operational protocols and responsible expenditure of federal funds. In September 2003, the Inspector General conducted a Pre-Audit Survey focusing on program years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002. The pre-audit process did not go well with the Commission cited for a lack of written policies and procedures and incomplete files for program monitoring. To a considerable degree concerns arose because the Pre-Audit Inspector refused to review electronic documents for which there were no hard copies.

In early 2004, the Commission was notified that a full-scope Inspector General audit was probable. The Executive Committee was especially active in supporting staff and developing a plan for the audit process. Efforts to refine and implement appropriate practices continued, but by this time most needed policies and procedures were codified. The Commission also engaged technical assistance providers to assist with audit preparation for programs and staff. The Inspector General Audit was conducted in the fall of 2004 and was a great success with minimal findings – none related to the operating practices of the Commission. Less than 1% of the funds reviewed were questioned and these funds involved just two AmeriCorps grantees.

The success in meeting the standards of the Inspector General Audit culminated a period of extensive organizational solidification. During this period procedural guides were crafted and put into use for each key operational function. Examples include:

- Consolidated Annual Calendar
- AmeriCorps Sub-Grantee Cooperative Agreements
- AmeriCorps Sub-Grantee Risk-Based Pre-Award Monitoring Process
- AmeriCorps Sub-Grantee Risk-Based Program Monitoring Process

- APR [Automated Progress Report] Review & Feedback
- Formalized AmeriCorps Sub-Grantee Site Visit Protocols
- Governor’s Conference on Community Service Planning Timeline

The Commission has also embraced technology and made a concerted effort to share information through its website and e-mail listservs. Policies and procedures are readily available, online registration for Commission events is available, and an interactive calendar is posted.

Furthermore, the Commissioners themselves have been reinvigorated with a broader spectrum of the community represented in leadership positions. To complement this new skill set, the Commissioners committee structure was redefined and simplified. Presently three standing committees – Organizational Development, Outreach, and Program – exist. These are working committees with clear expectations for Commissioner engagement. There is also momentum to invigorate the Foundation and actively seek complementary resources. A simple indicator of this new spirit is seen in the fact the Commission has achieved a quorum for each of its meetings since 2001. Prior to that date achieving a quorum was a challenge. The Commission also features a full roster of Commissioners with a waiting list.

With the national focus on Homeland Security, the Commission has also found a significant role in advancing and mobilizing CitizenCorps in partnership with the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). Citizen Corps’ national purpose is to harness the power of every individual through education, training, and volunteer service to make communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to the threats of terrorism, crime, public health issues, and disasters of all kinds. This purpose is accomplished through a [national network of state, local, and tribal CitizenCorps Councils](#). Currently the Commission features a full-time staff member devoted to growing CitizenCorps councils throughout the state.

The promotion of CitizenCorps represents one of the first major activities the Commission has undertaken to complement its standing role with AmeriCorps. Looking to the future, CitizenCorps council members could join Commissioners, Commission staff, AmeriCorps members, AmeriCorps program staff, and beneficiaries as ambassadors in promoting the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission.

This evolution positions the Commission to move ahead solidly, with unified purpose.

## **Mission**

The current mission of the Commission is: “The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission was established 1994 to promote, mobilize, and support the efforts of all Nebraskans who are united in strengthening their communities, state, and nation through volunteer and community service.”

A good mission statement clearly and succinctly states the organization’s purpose and reason for being in a way that mobilizes and inspires. The mission is a unifying force for the organization. The current Commission mission statement is sound, but could benefit from review and editing. This need is highlighted by the fact that abbreviated variations of the mission have emerged and are often used. In order to formulate a more concise Mission Statement, Commissioners and Commission Staff were surveyed. The results of this surveying and the related comments results in the following mission:

*Mobilizing Nebraskans to strengthen their communities through collaboration, volunteering , and national service programming.*

## **Values**

Underlying organizational values define the attitude of the Commission in implementing its Mission. Core values in guiding the inspired and rejuvenated Commission include:

### **Values**

*Values are the guiding principles  
for our work in serving the state.*

***Excellence:*** Pursuing the highest standards of performance in all endeavors through a spirit of continual improvement

***Responsiveness:*** Creatively exploring and embracing dynamic approaches to addressing current and emerging societal challenges

***Inclusiveness:*** Striving to involve and engage interested parties from all sectors of the state

***Collaboration:*** Involving complementary parties in mutually beneficial relationships

***Efficiency:*** Operating in a way which produces the greatest return for the least output of resources

***Integrity:*** Conducting all activities in accord with the highest ethical and moral standards

## **Constituent Input**

The Commission is dedicated to ensuring that its processes are open, accountable, and institute input for the community. In order to secure input regarding the functioning and aims of the Commission, a survey was conducted of key constituents.

Commissioners, AmeriCorps program staff, Commission staff, and selected key partners were surveyed. Unfortunately due to the timing of the creation of this strategic plan, it was not feasible to gain input from AmeriCorps members. Also, no key partners opted to respond to the survey. The survey instrument utilized a 5-point likert scale to measure perspectives on the competency and effectiveness of the Commission.

All constituencies responding expressed comfort with the efforts of the Commission. There was however consensus on the room for improvement in reaching out to rural parts of the state. The survey instrument is included as ATTACHMENT B at the conclusion of this report with a summary of the responses being ATTACHMENT C.

## **Environmental Factors: Potential Opportunities & Threats**

There are several environmental factors beyond the span of control of the Commission which present themselves as opportunities or threats to the well-being of the Commission dependent on how they are addressed. The Commission has made increasing effort to be aware and responsive to key trends and constituencies as it plots its course. Among the most vital are:

### **Demographic Trends**

Nebraska is changing. The Commission must support programming and position itself to maximize its relevance and vibrancy in the face of these changes. It should also assure programming supports emerging constituencies. Failure to do so diminishes both the impact and the reputation of the Commission. Trends include:

#### ***Population Growth:***

Despite concerns about a declining population base, the population in Nebraska has actually been modestly increasing over the past few years. This follows the decade of the 1990s during which the state experienced as 8.4% increase in population – the largest increase in any decade since 1910-20 and in contrast to a meager .5% growth during the 1980s. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> State and Local Population Trends, Jerry Deichert, UNO Center for Public Affairs Research

#### ***Increasing Urban Concentration:***

In 2003 Douglas, Lancaster and Sarpy counties accounted for 50.03% of Nebraska's population. Counties with smaller populations continue to shrink. <sup>2</sup> [See Attachment D: Population Change for Nebraska Counties: 1990-00 and 2000-03] However a longitudinal study focused on the cohort born between 1960 and 1969 reveals that while rural counties tended to lose population from this cohort during the 1980s [when people in this cohort were in their 20s], there was a rebound in the 1990s. This finding is by no means definitive, but it reveals that fears of the "brain drain" may be somewhat overstated. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> State and Local Population Trends, Jerry Deichert, UNO Center for Public Affairs Research

<sup>3</sup> "An Examination of Brain Drain in Nebraska Counties and Communities: Retention of the Population Cohort Age 10-19 Years of Age in 1980 through 2000" John C. Allen Professor of Rural Sociology and Randolph Cantrell, Professor of Extension – University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension

### *Aging Population: Baby Boomers*

During the 1990s the largest percentage changes in population for any 5-year age group was for the 45-49 [+52.1%] and the 50-54 [+49.9%] age cohorts. <sup>4</sup> [See Attachment E: Percentage Change in Nebraska Population by 5-Year Age Group, 1990-00]

<sup>4</sup> State and Local Population Trends, Jerry Deichert, UNO Center for Public Affairs Research

### *Increasing Diversity:*

July 2004 U.S. Census Bureau Estimates highlight the dramatic increase in ethnic minority, particularly Hispanic, individuals within Nebraska. The number of Hispanics in Nebraska jumped 27% since 2000 to 119,975 in July 2004. <sup>5</sup> Other multicultural populations continue to grow, particularly within the metropolitan areas of Omaha and Lincoln. Douglas County experienced a 55.8% [10,718 to 16,700] growth in the number of foreign-born residents between 1900 and 2000. During this same period Lancaster County experienced a 54% [5,342 to 8,228] growth. <sup>6</sup> In both counties there was significant breadth in country of origin.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Estimates, July 2004

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Immigration Statistics by County, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees

### **National & State Politics**

AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National & Community Service were initially implemented by President Clinton and was initially strongly identified with his presidency. This resulted in fears that momentum would falter or that these initiatives would be eliminated once President Clinton left office. This has not happened and, in fact, through demonstrable good works in communities nationwide, AmeriCorps now has strong national bipartisan support. Still, allocation of funds for the Corporation and the Commission are subject to annual debate and political vagaries.

On the state level, from its inception, the Commission has received implicit support from each Governor. Support has been demonstrated through gubernatorial involvement in the quarterly Nebraska Points of Light Volunteer Awards, addresses given at Commission events, and service by the First Lady as Honorary Chair of the Commission. Further support has not been significantly cultivated outside of the state Health & Human Services System [HHSS] and the state has been reticent to provide financial backing for the Commission. The HHSS in-kind financial management is a significant source of support. During the 2005 legislative session funds earmarked for the Commission were included in the mainline budget bill for the first time. These funds, \$22,000, were vetoed by the governor however. This veto highlights the need to further educate and inform Governor Heineman of the value of the Commission.

Governor Heineman has expressed four guiding priorities for his administration: education; economic vitality; efficiency in government; and protecting families. These priority areas complement the goals of the Commission and highlight the potential for future partnership.

Also noteworthy is the role of Third District U.S. Representative and 2006 gubernatorial candidate Tom Osborne. Representative Osborne emerged as one of the leading advocates for national service during the 2003 management and funding crisis at the Corporation for National & Community Service and has remained a vocal proponent of the ideals of national service. He currently serves as Co-chair of Congress' National Service Caucus with Representative Harold Ford, Jr. [D-TN].

### **Corporation for National & Community Service**

The Corporation for National & Community Service serves both as the federal "parent agency" of the Commission and its primary funder. As such, the Corporation is of great importance.

In the aftermath of its 2003 funding and management crisis, the Corporation has engaged new leadership and is more actively implementing policies, procedures and plans to ensure strong functioning. Accompanying this development is an increased opportunity for state input in the creation of key practices. Commissioners and staff have been active in expressing Nebraska's perspective and have established strong relationships with key personnel at all levels of the Corporation. The Commission's good-standing with the Corporation is furthered by its strong performance in the Inspector General's Audit.

The Corporation's enhanced policies and procedures complement the Commission's thrust for excellence and accountability. Newly issued federal Rules and Administrative Standards will form the framework for future Commission grant implementation.

Additionally, the Corporation has recently released a DRAFT version of its *Strategic Plan for 2005-2010*. This plan, likely to closely parallel the final version, was consciously created to be broad enough to allow each state a measure of discretion in implementing the plan. The Corporation's *Strategic Goals* are:

- Meeting critical needs in local communities through service;
- Strengthening communities to engage citizens; and
- Engaging Americans in a lifetime of volunteering and service.

The specific *Focus Areas for 2005-2010* to reach these strategic goals are:

- Building the supply line for America's armies of compassion – increasing the number of volunteers and the volunteer management capacity of community service organizations;
- Ensuring a brighter future for all of America's youth – meeting the most pressing needs of youth, whether academic or behavioral, familial or social, while improving their lives through the opportunity to serve;
- Engaging students in their communities – driving greater service on campus and bringing more service opportunities to K-12 classrooms; and
- Harnessing experience to meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges – creating the right service opportunities to unleash the wealth of talent possessed by the aging generation of Baby Boomers.

Each of these *Focus Areas* has specific national goals. Predictably, the *Focus Areas* complement historical aims of the Commission and provide a potential national support network for future Commission endeavors.

The breadth of the Corporation exceeds that of the Commission however. In Nebraska, the State Department of Education has responsibility for Learn & Serve while the Corporation State Office implements VISTA and Senior Corps programming. Cross-stream involvement occurs through representation by the Department of Education and State Corporation staff on the Commission.

### **Technological Evolution**

As technology continues to evolve and more information is available to more Nebraska residents in increasingly easy-to-access and convenient forms, there is a greater opportunity to readily utilize technology to broadly share information and a lesser need for conventional types of resource sharing such as resource libraries. The Commission has made great strides through its use of a variety of e-mail channels, conference calling, and a new interactive website.

As more information becomes readily available, opportunities are created for the Commission to align itself with data sources and the providing entities rather than “re-creating the wheel” and duplicating effort.

## **Organizational Strengths & Limitations**

### *Strengths*

- Volunteer and staff leadership committed to excellence
- Establishment of *Benchmarks for Success* and a goal of being one of the top 10 State commissions
- Positive relationships with the Corporation for National & Community Service
- Streamlined committee structure
- Inspired new Commissioners from western Nebraska
- Strong operational protocols and systems, especially related to AmeriCorps
- Strong funded AmeriCorps programs with documented successes and strong service networks
- Funded AmeriCorps programs engage members of great diversity – ethnic and ability/disability
- Successful completion of the Inspector General Audit
- Statewide involvement in Homeland Security through Citizen Corps initiatives
- Experience and mandate to provide training and technical assistance

### *Limitations*

- Lack of established programming beyond AmeriCorps
- Lack of funding mix – dependence on CNCS
- Lack of historical involvement/activity by the Volunteer and Community Service Foundation of Nebraska
- Uncertainty of future funding/role with Citizen Corps and thus Homeland Security



Limited programming outside of metropolitan Omaha and Lincoln  
Limited nurturing and capitalizing on non-financial relationships and partnership opportunities  
No clear established organizational “brand” or message  
Low organizational public profile  
Historical lack of consensus on Commission role in promoting volunteerism

## **Goals**

The Goals for the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission are informed by its history, external opportunities and challenges, and organizational strengths and limitations. These goals are – and must be – consistent with the mission and values. It is also vital that these goals complement those of the Corporation for National & Community Service and its recent strategic plan since the Commission will collaborate with the Corporation in the attainment of the goals contained in that plan and this one.

The organizational goals are divided into two broad categories: Managerial Excellence and Programmatic Distinction. Managerial Excellence involves maintaining and refining key systems, the infrastructure which will allow the Commission to thrive. Programmatic Distinction includes those Commission activities that have a direct impact on bettering the quality of life in Nebraska

There are also over-arching Philosophical Perspectives that enrich the Commission as it pursues Managerial Excellence and Programmatic Distinction. These Perspectives are offered first.

### ***Philosophical Perspectives***

#### **1. Think Big**

The Commission can and should be a “player” in addressing the problems of the state through the mobilization of national service participants and volunteers. Rather than focus inwardly on rules, regulations and Commission and Corporation standards focus on the needs in Nebraska community. Focus on non-traditional ways to extend service to communities through all streams of service. Areas to be addressed may include economic development, teacher retention, behavioral health or other larger scale issues identified or looming as state priorities. Collaboration with key leaders and others in identifying needs, developing specific plans, and implementing these plans is essential.

[Note: this is identified as a *Benchmark for Success* in a Commission-prepared document]

#### **2. Maximize Partnerships**

Recognize existing and emerging resources that complement the Commission’s mission and work. Align and link the Commission to these entities in a mutually beneficial way. Before embarking on any activity ask: Who else might be involved in this? Who else might be interested? With the answers to these questions contact those likely to be involved or interested.

At the very least, the Commission can consistently bring to each partnership a solid means of sharing and transmitting key information through its network of national service and volunteer contacts as well as its growing list of new partners.

### ***Managerial Excellence***

#### **1. Implement Relevant *Benchmarks for Success***

The Commission has recently taken a significant step towards cementing Managerial Excellence by adopting Benchmarks for Success. Relevant Benchmarks include the following key aims:

- Ensuring strong staff and volunteer leadership through professional development
- Continuing to engage Commissioners with strong community roles and relationships
- Maximizing accountability among Commissioners
- Enhancing the relationship with the Governor’s Office

- Continuing compliance with Corporation Administrative Standards

2. Energize the Nebraska Volunteer Foundation

As the Commission moves ahead, it is vital the Foundation move along with it – fully aware and supportive of the goals of the Commission. Especially as the Commission broadens its partnerships and expands its reach, new resources will be needed. The Foundation must take the lead in securing these resources. Hopefully the energy and clarity of purpose flowing through the Commission will be contagious and inspire the Foundation. The Board of the Foundation is currently motivated, but additional Board members with commitment and awareness of resources would be beneficial.

***Programmatic Distinction***

1. Continue to Refine and Cement AmeriCorps protocols – Solidify the Base

Successful administration of AmeriCorps is one of the core responsibilities of the Commission. It is vital that the Commission continue its work to solidify the strength of Commission management and program operation. Components include:

Respond to new Corporation rules and assure clear understanding by subgrantees and prospective subgrantees;

Align program funding processes with identified state and community priorities;

Ensure utilization and documentation of evaluation methodologies that produce compelling quantitative and qualitative results;

Strengthen programs and applicants to position them to successfully compete for Competitive program funding;

Nurture involvement of applicants and potential grantees in un-reached communities including faith communities and rural Nebraska; and

Assist programs in developing true sustainability plans so that the same grantees do not develop long-term dependencies on the Commission

Indicators of Success

- o More than 90% of all awarded AmeriCorps member slots are filled
- o More than 90% of all AmeriCorps members successfully complete service
- o Compliance with Corporation for National & Community Service Administrative Standards
- o Annual creation of clear funding priorities which align with demographic trends, political priorities, and Corporation priorities.
- o Documented evidence of discussion with at least 10 faith-based and community groups regarding utilization of national service participants
- o Annual funding of higher-than average number of Competitive grants [as compared to other states]
- o Attainment of program objectives by grantees, providing both quantitative and qualitative results.
- o Creation of program specific sustainability plans in collaboration with each program

2. Support – Don't Duplicate – Volunteerism Efforts

Engaging volunteers is central to all national service initiatives in order to maximize results, assist sustainability, and solidify community-based support. In the past few years a number of viable popular online databases have been developed to link prospective volunteers with community service entities needing volunteers. Similarly there are several quality websites providing sound information on volunteer management. Rather than attempting to create vast clearinghouses of information, link to these existing resources. This is especially logical as the 211 initiative broadens and sweeps across Nebraska. Beneficially, one of the key leaders of the 211 effort is a longstanding Commissioner and former Commission chair.

Indicators of Success

- o Linkage to existing online volunteer clearinghouses via the Commission website

- Co-marketing and promotion with Nebraska-based volunteer centers and community/volunteer leaders in communities without volunteer centers
- Standard objective for all AmeriCorps programs to recruit, support, and recognize volunteers
- Promotion of volunteer participation in AmeriCorps initiatives
- Strong collaboration in a supportive role with the 211 initiative

3. Enhance Marketing

Utilize the mission as the basis for creating a marketing initiative aimed at establishing a clear “brand” for the Commission – marking the Commission as the leader in national and community service in Nebraska. This marketing initiative should be active – including public presentations to widely varied professional and geographic groups as well as the preparation of collateral materials.

This marketing thrust should highlight the beneficial outcome of national service on the community and the way in which national service serves to leverage other resources. Commissioners, commission staff, AmeriCorps program staff, and AmeriCorps members must view themselves as ambassadors for the Commission.

Indicators of Success

- Development and implementation of a comprehensive marketing plan
- Ensure that marketing messages highlight positive impact of Commission on families
- Consistent “messaging” in all communications
- Development of clear consistent easy-to-understand print and electronic materials
- Consistent use of the website to further the “brand”
- Utilization of e-communication and e-newsletters to further involvement and understanding
- Active co-marketing with partners
- Development of a Speaker’s Bureau
- Scheduling of at least 15 presentations to community groups each year

4. Engage Youth

In order to sustain Commission efforts and build a culture of service, it is essential to engage the emerging generation. This is also in accord with the Corporation for National & Community Service goals.

Indicators of Success

- Documented evidence of communication and collaboration with each institution of higher learning’s student involvement [or comparable] office.
- Utilization of youth commissioners to promote service on campuses statewide
- Implementation of Day of Service activities on 60% of all campuses for each Day of Service
- Development and implementation of a Speaker Bureau making presentations to at least 50 K-12 classrooms annually on the value of national & community service
- Support of programs benefiting youth

5. Engage “Baby Boomers”

As the mass of the population in Nebraska and across the nation ages, it is important to engage those in retirement or approaching retirement ages in fulfilling forms of community service. This is also in accord with the Corporation for National & Community Service goals.

Indicators of Success

- Development of marketing materials clearly speaking to “Baby Boomers” regarding opportunities for involvement and the benefits of national service
- Co-marketing with state volunteer centers and other volunteer management leaders to design and market for volunteer opportunities for Baby Boomers
- Collaboration with retired educators through existing associations

- At least 75% of Boomers engaged in service rate their service/volunteer experience as excellent
- At least 75% of Baby Boomers engaged in service assert that their experience has given them a significant chance to bring about change in their community

#### 6. Re-Engineer Approach to Trainings & Technical Assistance

Regarding training and technical assistance to AmeriCorps grantees, recognize that training can and must take a variety of forms and need not be event-focused. Individualized technical assistance and prompt information sharing can be exceedingly beneficial. Encouraging peer support is another approach that has not been utilized extensively in the past. The Commission can also foster a roster of experts in varied operational and managerial topics – serving as a gateway to these experts and consultants contracted to the Corporation for National & Community Service

With training events, exert creativity in broadening the base of those involved in formulating, conducting, and attending the training. Through this expansion, the provision of training and technical assistance can be a major way to legitimize the Commission to broader audiences and establish credibility with emerging partners as a viable entity. Revenue generated from training activities can also serve as a way to diversify the Commission's funding mix.

##### Indicators of Success

- Evidence of consultation with at least 10 diverse community or statewide public or private entities annually regarding co-training opportunities
- Commission established as the lead agency and point of contact with an established and marketed statewide theme for a selected major Day of Service with significant support offered for each such Day [Martin Luther King, Jr Day, National Youth Service Day, Join Hands Day, Make a Difference Day, or National Family Volunteer Day]
- Implementation of a variety of training methodologies
- Public participation in Commission sponsored trainings increasing 10% annually
- Positive cash flow for each training opportunity accessible to the public

#### 7. Use Citizen Corps as a Means to Invigorate and Make Inroads into New Communities

As Citizen Corps expands throughout Nebraska, it is involving residents in assuring the security of their communities. Many of the individuals engaged to assist with organizing this effort local are indigenous leaders – key people whose support and understanding could be invaluable in expanding the reach of the Commission into parts of the state it currently does not touch. Marketing materials and personal interaction should assure that these individuals are aware of the full scope of the Commission's activities and additional ways that the Commission can benefit their community.

##### Indicators of Success

- 80% of CitizenCorps members score at least 75% on a Commission-created test indicating strong understanding of the Commission
- CitizenCorps Council member participation in National Days of Service
- CitizenCorps Council member participation in Commission-sponsored trainings
- Commissioner participation in CitizenCorps in their communities

#### 8. Foster the Appearance and Reality of Unity in National Service in Nebraska

Although three different entities implement key national service initiatives in Nebraska, every effort should be made to present a seamless collaborative front. The Nebraska Department of Education [administering Learn & Serve], the Corporation for National & Community Service State Office [administering VISTA and Senior Corps] and the Commission [administering AmeriCorps] must truly partner in every logical manner. This will increase efficiency while also easing public understanding of the breadth of national service.

The Commission should take the lead in this through the current representation of the Department of Education and the Corporation State Office on the Commission. Past efforts such as creation of previous Unified State Plans and ongoing involvement form a solid foundation. Future consistent information sharing is essential. Collaborative marketing would be exceedingly beneficial. Quantifiable measures of collaboration should be set. Assistance should be sought for the national Corporation for National & Community Service to mitigate any “turf issues” or other concerns if any arise.

#### Indicators of Success

- Information and resource sharing regarding VISTA/Senior Corps and Learn & Serve through presentations by representatives of those entities at each Commission meeting. Reflected in Commission minutes
- Co-training across streams of service
- Evidence of resource sharing across streams of service
- New program model implementation models with grantees utilizing members from multiple streams of service
- Active participation by National Direct AmeriCorps programs in Commission activities as evidenced by attendance at Commission trainings and events and participation in the InterCorpsCouncil.

## **ATTACHMENT A**

### **EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 94-5**

WHEREAS, community service is a vital component in meeting the needs of Nebraska's communities;

WHEREAS, Nebraska's citizens can unite communities and, working together for the betterment of State, truly make us "One Nebraska";

WHEREAS, community service challenges people of all ages and all walks of life to strengthen our communities by "getting things done," thereby making the good life better.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, E. Benjamin Nelson, Governor of the State of Nebraska, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and statutes of the State of Nebraska, do hereby order the creation of the Nebraska Commission for National and Community Service to engage the idealism and energy of Nebraskans to meet the most critical needs of our communities.

The Commission will consist of not more than 25 voting members and not more than 10 ex-officio, non-voting members. Commission membership will include:

- \* A representative of a community-based agency or organization in the State;
- \* The head of the Nebraska Department of Education or his/her designee;
- \* A representative of local governments in the State; \*
- \* A representative of local labor organizations in the State;
- \* A representative of business;
- \* A representative of a national service program;
- \* A representative of persons with disabilities;
- \* An individual between the ages of 16 and 25 who is a participant or supervisor of a service program for youth, or of a campus-based or national service program.
- \* An individual with expertise in the educational, training and development needs of youth, particularly disadvantaged youth;
- \* An individual with experience in promoting the involvement of adults (as defined in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 4950 et seq.) in service and volunteerism.

In choosing additional members of the Commission, representatives of the following will be given priority in the selection process but are not mandated membership positions.

- Educators, including institutions of higher education agencies; representatives education and from local.
- Experts in the delivery of human, environmental, educational or public safety services to communities and persons;
- Representatives of Indian tribes;
- Out of school or at-risk youth; and
- Others as deemed appropriate.

In membership selection, a balance with respect to race, gender, age, ethnicity and disability characteristics shall be apriority. Not more than 50% plus one of the voting members may be from the same political party. The number of voting members of the Commission who are officers or employees of the State may not exceed 25% (reduced to the nearest whole number) of the total voting membership.

The Governor will appoint Commission members in April of each year for a term of three years or until a successor is appointed, except the initial appointments which shall be staggered with one third of the members appointed to one-year terms, one third of the members appointed to two-year terms, and one-third of the members appointed to three-year terms. As vacancies occur, new members shall be appointed to serve for the remainder of the term for which the predecessor was appointed.

The voting members of the Commission shall select one of the voting members to serve as Chairperson of the Commission.

Commission members will be eligible for reimbursement of necessary and allowable expenses as provided under State law for members of boards and commissions. When the law requires a state agency or department to have a representative on the Commission, that state agency or department will accept responsibility for the expenses incurred as a result of attendance at Commission meetings and activities. The Commission shall have the following responsibilities:

1. To develop a state comprehensive national and community service plan.
2. To promote national service programs and community service in Nebraska.
- 3 To coordinate community service activities and programs In Nebraska.
4. To identify and solicit community service programs and projects in Nebraska and select which applications, from those submitted to the Commission, will be recommended to the Corporation for National and Community Service for funding.
5. To administer AmeriCorps national and community service grants in Nebraska, which shall include assistance with the provision of health care and child care benefits for AmeriCorps participants.
6. To provide training, technical assistance and other assistance as needed to AmeriCorps program grantees and other community service programs upon request.
7. To assist the Nebraska Department of Education with preparation of their AmeriCorps application.

The Commission will report to the Governor. Reporting responsibilities include identifying areas of success, documenting areas of need, and recommending policy initiatives or legislation where needed.

This order is effective immediately.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the Great Seal of the State of Nebraska to be affixed this 26<sup>th</sup> day of July, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and ninety-four.

E. Benjamin Nelson  
Governor

Attest:  
Allen J. Beermann  
Secretary of State

## ATTACHMENT B



# Strategic Planning Input

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission is in the process of conducting a strategic plan to review its performances and practices and affirm a clear direction for the future. Please take a few moments to answer the questions below, save this document, and submit it via e-mail to Greg Donovan at [gregsdonovan@yahoo.com](mailto:gregsdonovan@yahoo.com). If you have any questions, please contact Greg at that address or Debra Hartmann at [debra.hartmann@hhss.ne.gov](mailto:debra.hartmann@hhss.ne.gov).

***We need your input to assure that this process is inclusive. Thank you!***

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission exists to: \_\_\_\_\_

The first three words I think of when I think of the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

For each of the statements below please use the 5 point scale to indicate your degree of agreement.

1 = strongly agree    5 = strongly disagree

I have a good understanding of what the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission does	1	2	3	4	5
The Commission is a high functioning organization	1	2	3	4	5
The Commission demonstrates leadership	1	2	3	4	5
The Commission is primarily a funder of AmeriCorps programming	1	2	3	4	5
The Commission is responsive to emerging needs	1	2	3	4	5
The Commission does a good job in reaching all parts of the state	1	2	3	4	5
The Commission provides outstanding training opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
These training opportunities are beyond the technical aspects of AmeriCorps	1	2	3	4	5
I turn to the Commission and its publications/website for useful information	1	2	3	4	5
The Commission should coordinate volunteer activity within Nebraska	1	2	3	4	5
Commission staff are knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5
Commission staff nurture partnerships and good working relationships	1	2	3	4	5
I am glad I am involved with the Commission	1	2	3	4	5

In the next year, I think the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission should focus on

[List up to 3 items below, with the most pressing item listed first]

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

***The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission will make no effort to identify individual respondents. The information below is requested to better understand the views of individuals important to the Commission.***

Role:    Commissioner    \_\_\_    AmeriCorps Member    \_\_\_    Program Staff    \_\_\_    Commission Staff    \_\_\_    Partner \_\_\_  
Length of Relationship with the Commission:    \_\_\_ Less than 1 year,    \_\_\_ 2-5 years,    \_\_\_ more than 5 years

## **ATTACHMENT C**

### **Strategic Planning Input**

For Questions 1 - 12, respondents were asked to scale their replies, 1=strongly agree / 5= strongly disagree

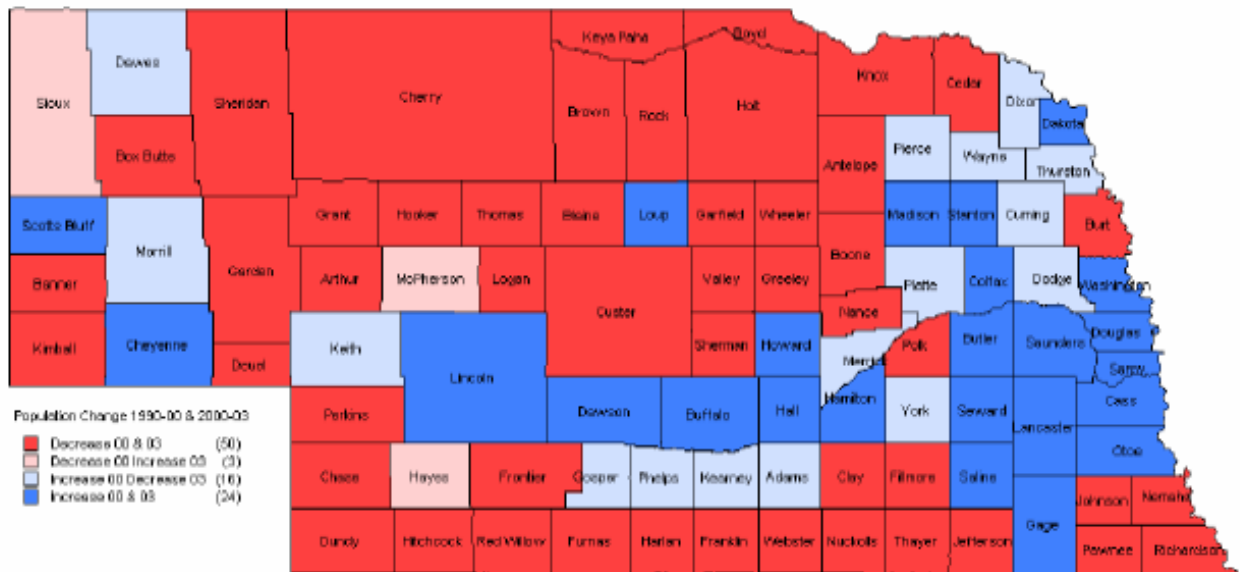
#### ***Average Scores***

	<b><u>Commissioners</u></b>	<b><u>AmeriCorps Program Staff</u></b>	<b><u>Commission Staff</u></b>	<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>
Total Response	7	4	5	16
1. Understanding of purpose	2.17	2.25	1.20	2.19
2. High functioning organization	2.33	2.50	2.80	2.38
3. Demonstrates leadership	2.33	2.00	2.60	2.25
4. Primarily an AmeriCorps funder	2.00	3.00	2.60	2.06
5. Responsive to emerging needs	2.83	1.75	3.20	2.56
6. Reaches all parts of the state	3.33	2.67	4.20	3.00
7. Provides outstanding training opportunities	2.33	3.00	2.75	2.50
7a. Training is more than AmeriCorps	2.50	2.67	2.40	2.38
8. Good source of useful information	3.17	1.50	3.20	2.75
9. Should coordinate volunteers statewide	1.67	3.00	3.60	2.00
10. Staff are knowledgeable	1.67	1.50	1.20	1.63
11. Staff nurture partnerships	1.83	1.50	1.60	1.75
12. Glad to involved with Commission	1.33	1.50	1.00	1.38
Next Year's Goals [list up to three]	Partnerships (4) Promoting Volunteerism Statewide (3) Rural outreach (3) Training to assure future positive audits enhance AmeriCorps operations  More competitive grants Expand CitizenCorps Encourage sustainability Enhance awareness of Commission Hurricane relief support	Policy clarification Program staff training (2) Member training (2) Statewide marketing push	Promote all national service Promote National Days of Service Network for Days of Service Statewide volunteer coordination Increase media coverage Establish/promote brand as service leader Implement Strategic Plan Support potential AmeriCorps Cross-stream collaboration Commissioner development Address Nebraska's emerging needs Rural outreach	



## ATTACHMENT D

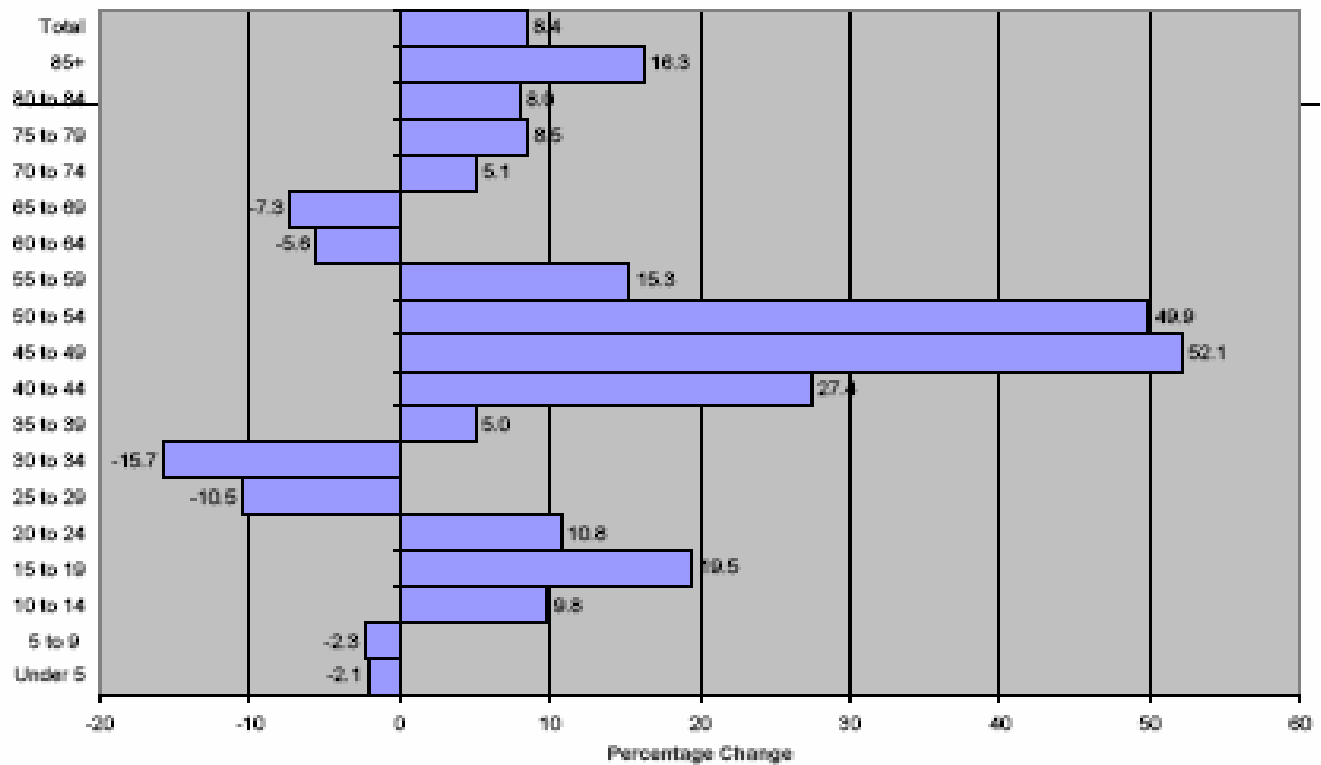
### Population Change for Nebraska Counties: 1990-00 and 2000-03



Source: State and Local Population Trends  
Jerry Deichert, UNO Center for Public Affairs Research  
Fifteenth Annual Nebraska State Data Center Summer Conference

## ATTACHMENT E

Percentage Change in Nebraska Population by 5-Year Age Group, 1990-00



Source: State and Local Population Trends  
Jerry Deichert, UNO Center for Public Affairs Research  
Fifteenth Annual Nebraska State Data Center Summer Conference



## **BENCHMARKS FOR SUCCESS**

### **History and methodology for the proposed benchmarks:**

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission (NVSC) set as its vision to be among the top ten Commissions in the country. NVSC is fully compliant in meeting the State Administrative Standards set by its federal funding agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and recently underwent a successful Office of Inspector General full-scope audit. In order to move to an enhanced level of quality, the NVSC will gather benchmarks to set new standards of excellence for the state. The Commission Executive Director (ED) researched possible key indicators by:

1. Discussing definitions and practices of excellence with the leadership of similar state commissions
2. Discussing standards of excellence (outside of Administrative Standards and audits) with the Director of State and National AmeriCorps, who was also the former Chair of the Texas State Commission and the Association of State Service Commissions
3. Polling Corporation program officers on their interpretations of excellence in state commissions
4. Participating in a focus group reflecting upon the newly published *State Profiles and Performance Report Program Year 2002-2003*
5. Serving on the CNCS State Performance Report Advisory Group to inform Nebraska's discussions of excellence

Data was gathered from all sources, benchmarks designed and functionally associated with each of the Commission's standing committees, although there is considerable overlap among committees. Strategies are suggested for reaching the benchmarks, and evaluation methodology will be developed to determine success.

BENCHMARK		STRATEGIES
Executive and Org Dev Committees	Strong leadership exists among Commissioners and staff simultaneously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take advantage of training opportunities for commissioners &amp; staff               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Conference</li> <li>In-house training/coaching</li> </ul> </li> <li>Provide leadership opportunities for commissioners and staff</li> <li>Address staff retention issues that can be influenced by commissioners</li> </ul>
	Commissioners are well-placed and open doors for the commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need highly-functioning commissioners who bring resources (money, in-kind, connections) that further the commission's goals               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What will it take to bring them on?</li> <li>Existing Commissioners can reach out to potential high-functioning individuals and encourage them to expand upon what's been started at the Commission</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Strong board development is in place The Commission, committees and individual commissioners have expectations and are accountable. To maintain the health of the Commission and to ensure fresh ideas, Commissioners are cycled on and off.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide supporting data from outside sources               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pass along Board Café articles</li> <li>Consider bringing in Doug Eadie for board work</li> <li>Independent Sector data</li> </ul> </li> <li>Update Commission Guidelines to reflect accountability and regular review of performance</li> <li>Enforce accountability</li> <li>Provide opportunities for continued involvement for former commissioners               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundation?</li> <li>Commissioner Alumni group?</li> <li>Awards judges</li> </ul> </li> <li>Develop succession planning to provide continuity</li> </ul>
Outreach Comm	The Commission has a strong, supportive relationship with the Governor's Office. The visible message is that the commission is important to the Governor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commission leadership calls upon the Governor to educate him about the commission and its work (vetoed funding highlights this need)</li> <li>Request the Governor/First Lady's support in sponsoring a "tailgate" fundraiser, or lunch w/a leader with a silent auction, and ask them to invite their friends.</li> <li>Demonstrate how NVSC can help meet Governor's compelling state needs (behavioral health reform?) Child protection? Foster care?</li> <li>Could AmeriCorps members support special events at the mansion that are consistent with program objectives?</li> </ul>

BENCHMARK		STRATEGIES
Executive and Org Dev Committees	The Commission will not have audit issues, reports are timely, and has a portfolio of <b><u>well-trained programs</u></b> (large view—cross-stream, communities?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tie new administrative standards to staff objectives</li> <li>• Audit resolution by December 2005</li> <li>• Re-vamp training and technical assistance in accordance with CNCS training and technical assistance performance measurements</li> <li>• Expand training to a larger constituency; charge fees for non national service participants to attend</li> </ul>
	The Commission reaches out to national direct AmeriCorps programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Directs on e-mail lists</li> <li>• National Directs incorporated into website</li> <li>• Regular meetings with program directors and NVSC ED</li> <li>• Commissioner visits to National Direct sites.</li> </ul>
	The Commission uses AmeriCorps as a tool to address other pressing issues in the state: economic development or youth, for example	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research other funding sources that could be leveraged against AmeriCorps program funding</li> <li>• ED seek out and participate in economic development groups or human services group focused on youth</li> <li>• Promote the commission to schools</li> <li>• Seek out a YES ambassador (a bonus that Sally Ganem is an educator—could she help us find match funding of about \$20,000?)</li> <li>• Partner with FCCLA or other youth service organizations</li> </ul>
Program Committee	The Commission funds a higher-than-average number of competitive grants. This reflects a strong trust from CNCS that the state recommends and funds only the best programs and has the capacity to oversee them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build exceptionally strong programs that can compete nationally, through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pre-award training</li> <li>○ Expectations set out in RFP and Cooperative Agreement</li> <li>○ Develop Nebraska Administrative Standards</li> <li>○ Re-vamped Risk-Based Monitoring Strategy</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop a scoring matrix that is detailed and funds only those grants scoring a certain percentage or higher</li> </ul>
	The Commission uses data to inform the selection of priority areas for program focus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (RUPRI, NDE, NSEA, United Way, Office of Rural Health, Dept of Economic Development)</li> <li>• Incorporate national priorities if they intersect with Nebraska needs</li> </ul>

<b>Programs /Outreach Committee</b>	The Commission responds proactively to the new AmeriCorps Rule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NVSC must take a stand on issues such as sustainability, maximum cost per member, “blended” programs to minimize cost per FTE</li> </ul>
	The Commission has established benchmarks for program success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set expectations for member enrollment, fill rates, retention rates, etc. that reflect those in the <i>CNCS State Profiles and Performance Report</i>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enrollment</li> <li>○ Retention</li> <li>○ Use of ed award</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Provide targeted training and technical assistance to assist program’s to be successful.</li> <li>• Leverage other dollars – “Compassion Capital”?</li> <li>• Develop a way to reflect a fair assessment of actual match and leveraging</li> </ul>
	The Commission enhances Nebraska’s program visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop high impact program measurements, which roll up into the state performance report.</li> <li>• Submit Nebraska program best practices on national website</li> <li>• Use Website to further heighten program awareness</li> </ul>
	The Commission has a methodical strategy to reach out to underserved communities (prisoners, rural, faith-based, etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a Request for Proposal outreach show to encourage new applicants to apply</li> </ul>